

Yellow

“Can people tell that you are Jewish just by looking?”

The moment he walked in to the house, Ashley asked him this question, didn't even wait till Davin took off his shoes.

“And good evening to you too.”

“Can they?”

“When you say people, you mean Americans?”

Ashley often asked questions like this. Though she had a pretty good understanding about American culture for an international student, she habitually admitted that she couldn't have a complete understanding of American culture - ever. She nodded.

“I... don't know,” he said

Or can they? Davin wondered. Both of Davin's parents were Jewish, but he didn't have the typical look of many Jewish men. He was not too far away from the Jewish stereotype but enough for people to not believe him when he said he was Jewish. Still, he wondered, could non-Jewish people tell that he was Jewish? He just didn't know. He sat on the edge of the bed, where she was lying down with a *Talmud* in her hand.

“I honestly don't know,” he continued, “My mom wears the Jewish star necklace, though.”

Davin didn't understand why Ashley was asking this, but he knew her enough to know he should just answer the questions. She wouldn't stop until she got all the answers that she wanted. Davin loosened up his tie, which normally was Ashley's job, but Ashley was giving that look she made when thinking about something. Lips opened slightly like she was sucking the back of her pencil, her eyes staring at somewhere far away, her face tilted. She stretched her body, while reaching for a pillow. He tried to leave the bed, getting up, she pulled his arm and lay him in the bed. She took off his blazer, threw it down under the bed, and asked, “Were you ever discriminated against because of that necklace?”

“Hmm. . . . My family was once denied access to a shop and restaurant. . .and people called me kike before.”

“Are you serious? You should have sued or something.” Her normally small eyes

enlarged a bit.

“Do you have any idea how much of a pain it is to sue? It wasn’t like WalMart, it was just a mall store. We couldn’t have got anything out of it.”

She dropped her head, still touching his arm and hand. She got up and held him from behind, wrapping her arm around his neck.

“Tell me more.”

He had to think back for a while. It was a memory that he hadn’t thought about in long time. It was one of those things that he didn’t talk about with anybody but with his counselor.

“And not like you’re just reading this off from a history reference book -- tell me how you felt," she added. He dusted a smile from his face.

“That’s what my counselor used to say to me.”

“Well, I guess I’m on the right track then.”

Ashley was a psychology major who always wanted to be a counselor since she was five. He pushed her over to bed and kissed her forehead. She laughed a light laugh like that of an innocent child, which reminded him of something that he couldn’t remember.

“How about you? Were you ever discriminated because you are Korean?”

“Oh, no, no. You’re not doing this, I asked first.”

She held him closer and giggled again. He started to think of some way to say that he loved her in most memorable way, different from the everyday expression.

“You’re just trying to get into my pants, that’s what you’re doing.”

“Oh, I’m sorry. I didn’t know racism is such a turn-on topic. I forgot how horny you got after reading *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, my bad.”

Feeling her feet touching his back, he teased her. She laughed once again. She always appreciated his sarcastic jokes.

“You’re not trying to talk about racism, you’re trying to ask me about *my* personal experience.”

She argued that when guys ask about girls personal experience, they’re trying to act like they care about the girls to make them vulnerable so they can sleep with them.

“So it can’t be because I actually care about how you feel, or want to know who you are,

right?"

"Not ever."

And she giggled. Remembering how he was when he first met her, how he blushed so much that he was even redder than the red shirt he was wearing. Yeah, right. Like he could ever be *that* guy. Though he did seem to know how to handle her, Ashley knew that he wasn't really trying anything, but simply doing what he always did: actually listening to her because she was there talking to him, and appreciating her, because there weren't many women who found him interesting enough to talk to. Anyway, the first time they met, one thing led to another, and he woke up next to a girl for the first time in his life.

The story that she told him eventually was this. When she was spending a year in Alabama, her close friend from high school was doing something he considered to be "friendly teasing."

"It's not like he's a total dick, he isn't. If anything he's a great guy. Joseph."

Then she diverged to tell him how great a friend Joseph was. When she first went to the U.S. she didn't own a party dress, but wanted to go to Homecoming. She was supposed to borrow her homecoming dress from one of her friends, who came late. As Ashley was waiting outside with her shorts and shirts on, he pulled up his pants to match Ashley's shorts and stood next to her the whole time, though he had to suffer his girlfriend's screaming phone call for an hour after that night.

"And when my friend arrived she gave me make up and the dress. Me and my group of friend danced all night, it was so much fun."

She started to shake her feet a little bit up in air, completely forgetting why she started to tell the story.

"Let's dance."

"What?"

She pulled his arm, getting him up from the bed and wrapping his arm around her waist. Instead of putting her hand on his shoulder, she touched his neck instead, the tip of her thumb touching his earlobe. She held her head up high. She was a short girl, even for an Asian. Most times she would fit herself quite uncomfortably in high heels, especially when she meeting

Davin. Now she was wearing just a shirt and panties, and he could see her nipples through her shirt. His shirt, to be exact. It was one of his oversized shirts that he sometimes wore when he went to bed. She must have found it in his drawer somewhere. As these thoughts went through his head, he couldn't help but blush. She reached in his pocket without asking, turned on a song that she had put in his Iphone, and threw it in to bed. "Save me from myself," one of the few pop songs song he found tolerable. As he spun her around, she started to move her lips, pretending to sing the song.

"You're gonna save me from myself, I know it's hard. . . ."

She sang out short parts, the only parts where she remembered the exact lyrics. When she pulled him closer, she laughed again.

"So I was right, that you were trying to get in to my pants?"

"Could I just remind you that *you* started to talk about race?"

"So maybe *I* was trying to get into *your* pants than. You have problem with that?"

Davin laughed for the first time that night, shaking his head -- half indicating that he didn't, half thinking in his head, *Oh, Ashley*. They went to bed quite late that night, so they had to cancel the brunch meeting with their friends, the Greenburgs.

* * *

Ashley came back to her small apartment. She easily could have had bigger apartment, but she didn't feel like getting a big place while living alone. Someday, when she had family, she would want a big house with a garden, a playground filled with sand, and a tree house. She threw her purse and jacket on piles of other jackets on top of sofa, and walked in to her room without taking off her heels. She took out a microwavable Chinese dinner from the freezer. As she was waiting for it to be done, she checked her voice mail, a habit that she developed when she was going out with Davin. Ashley never grew in to the habit of checking her phone, and always left the phone muted, not even on vibration. Since she rarely called back to any missed call, Davin stopped calling her cell phone at all. At least when Davin called her house she couldn't mute it.

"You have five messages."

Every one of them was an advertisement, so she sighed in disappointment. She took a beer from the refrigerator and put it on her forehead to cool herself down. She gulped down a sip, feeling warm tears running down her face. She'd been getting called about the same company's advertisement over and over again. She could have contacted this company to tell them that she didn't want these advertisements anymore but she never got around to it.

There was a time when checking voicemail was a small joy for her. Like eating a bite-size Godiva Chocolate.

“Hey, baby. How was your day? I was just wondering if I left my suit there last night. Call me, I love you.”

“Hey, did you have dinner already? I'm meeting with the Goldmans for dinner, you know the couple that I told you about? The teacher couple at Saint James high? I was wondering if you can make it. Hmm, that's it... Hehe, I love you.”

And the last message he left, the one she listened to over and over again. She still hadn't called back a reply.

“Hey, I... I think we should talk.”

* * *

He brought a bottle of wine back home and little plant pot that had gothic patterns on it. Ashley reached for the plant pot first, her eyes blinking in attempt to search for old memories.

“This makes me think about the time...”

“The time that we made a miniature Notre Dame de Paris. I know. That's why I brought it.”

“You are way too nice to me these days.” She took the pot and placed on the middle of his table. He got out a pot for cooking pasta from the shelf, biting his lips. After dinner, when she went in to take a shower, he sat on a couch reading a book that he hadn't read for a long time. She came out wearing something that covered almost none of her body. That was her favorite outfit for their nights together. Though he wasn't that crazy about that particular outfit, he got used to it long time ago. Now he felt like he had already grown out of it.

“I thought I should be nice to you, too.”

“Ashley, I just think I’m way too tired tonight.”

“You’ve been way too tired for about a week now.”

“I’m sorry.”

“Don’t apologize. Just... I’ll go get changed.”

She didn’t come out for hours, so Davin finally went inside the room to check if she was okay. She was already asleep. Without getting in to bed he kneeled on the floor and looked at her face closely. Her nose was definitely lower than his nose, and her face was little darker. She had very pale skin for an Asian. She never wore any sunscreen, which was very unusual for Korean girls, but never got sunburned or dark. She had single eyelids. Davin had especially liked her eyes at the beginning of their relationship, mysterious eyes that were barely visible when she smiled. He once even asked her if she could see and smile at the same time. He took off her glasses. Ashley usually took off her glasses before she went to bed, but today she must have been a little out of sorts. He noticed that she didn’t have a bridge from her eyes her to her forehead for the first time. Now there really was nothing that he didn’t know about her. It took a year and three months for mystery to turn into familiarity. He slept alone out on a couch that night again.

* * *

He held his hands tighter to stop them from shaking. He covered his mouth with his tightly held hands.

“Baby, please, can you say something?”

Ashley’s voice was almost cracking. Her shirt was all wrinkled, her make-up messed up. She had dark bags hanging below her eyes.

“I... I don’t know what to say, what am I supposed to say?”

She didn’t say anything back. She sat next to him on the couch. After few more minutes she tried to reach out to hold him, but he flinched, so she just sat there. After a long sigh, she gathered her stuff to go back to her place.

“Call me... if you want to”, she said.

Right before she was going to close the door, he asked, “Did that mean anything to you?”

“Yes, but it doesn’t mean enough to hurt you like this.”

The next day, he got a text from her and he went to his favorite restaurant where she said she made a reservation for dinner.

“Have you eaten anything?” even before saying hi, she asked.

“Not really.”

The waiter was there to take their orders already, and they both were little more relieved because of that. She ordered seafood pasta, and steak well-done.

“Would you like anything to drink?” he asked.

“I’m good. Just water.”

He was surprised that she passed on drinks; he didn’t think he could handle the awkwardness without a drink.

“Gin, please.”

“He means Gin and tonic, no ice” She added. He looked at her. He rarely drank. She had seen him drinking Gin only once or twice. She also has a horrible memory about anything. Once the waiter went away, Ashley leaned closer to the table and pulled her chair closer.

“Although, I really don’t want you to drink on an empty stomach.”

He finally started the conversation long afterwards, in the middle of cutting the steak.

“Was it something I did?”

“What do you mean?”

“I mean, am I doing something wrong?”

“No.” She shook her head, “it was never about something you did.”

“But he did mean something to you.”

“Yeah, because it was just so comfortable, and I don’t mean in that way. We were talking about this TV show that we watched as a child, how we felt when people asked if we were Chinese, how we would expect some things from our partner who is American and they just sometimes completely miss it or how we completely miss it.”

“Why didn’t you just tell me then, the things you expect from me? I would have gladly

do them, and you didn't miss anything....”

“I just... didn't know that I was disappointed. So yeah, this really is my fault. I didn't know myself enough. And I've lived here for five years now. Now I do find *Family Guy* funny. I know what you expect from me.”

“You mean, what US TV shows expect from a girlfriend. I expect mine to not sleep with other guys.” Without thinking, it just came out of his mouth. He looked closely at Ashley to see if she was offended. She didn't seem offended as much as just surprised that Davin said something like that.

They went to their separate houses after dinner. Even as they say goodbye to each other Davin was trying to say that he was sorry for what he said, but he didn't know how to begin. About a week later, he picked her up from her house and went to Korean restaurant. He tried to read the menu, and order food in Korean with Ashley's help. He brought her back to his place and turned on a DVD, *King's Man*, a Korean movie that has a traditional palace as setting, the movie Ashley once said to be her favorite Korean movie. They meant to see it at some point, just never got around it because Korean DVDs were so much harder to find, but he got help from his Korean friend. As a guy who working in the IT business, he knew a lot of Koreans. He just never had been that close to any of them because they all hung out with each other. *King's Man* was a sad movie and Ashley started to cry but that was long after Davin had to grab some Kleenex for himself. Ashley was about to fall asleep on the couch, and Davin whispered a Korean sentence to her. She had to hear it twice before she understood what Davin was saying, because of his horrible pronunciation. *I am my beloved's and my beloved is mine*. Though she was atheist, he was sure that she read had this in the *Old Testament* before.

* * *

Davin came back to his apartment, which was bigger than it needed to be for someone who lived alone. He had his friends over quite often and his friends found him comfortable. He was an excellent cook, hardly ever complaining, or aggressively talkative, and he lived alone in a big house. He took off his shoes and put them neatly inside the shoe cabinet, and wore slippers.

It's a habit that he started because Ashley never kept her shoes on in his house.

"You don't have to take off your shoes. It's your own house. Do whatever you want to," said Ashley when he first started to do this.

"But your feet get dirty."

"Well, that's not really only part of my body that gets dirty when I come here, is it?"

He let out a small bitter laughter. His gigantic house without anybody looked like a broad desert.

It was just a few months ago, when Rosana was sitting right there on the right side of the couch.

"I know, it's a horrible name isn't it?"

"Bet not a lot of people can forget it though, Rosana Rosen." He made a little tune, and sang the name. They had a mutual friend who was also Jewish. They ran out of punch, and when Davin went inside to make some more, and Rosana offered to help.

"So my dad blessed me using Klingon on my bar mitzvah, and there was a person who actually understood what he was saying."

They both laughed out loud.

"I don't know which is cooler. The fact that your dad thought of that prank, or the fact that both your dad and you know how to speak Klingon."

"Well, he needed to practice for a while, but he does this *Star Trek* Marathon night with me in every Christmas and one of the days in summer vacation. So not much practice needed."

"I did that with my friends. If I ever have a kid, I guess I would try that."

"Can you speak Klingon?"

"No, but I can understand a little bit when I hear it."

His phone rang. It was from Ashley telling him that she couldn't make it to the party because she was quite drunk. He asked if she needed a ride, and she said Daniel was giving her a ride.

"Who is Daniel?"

“Oh, this guy I met in bar today. I’ll talk to you later.”

“Okay, goodnight. I love you.”

He stared at the phone for a while without saying anything, so Rosana asked if there was something wrong.

“Nothing. Just little worried that my girlfriend is getting a ride from a stranger.”

“Oh, do you need someone to go and pick her up? I haven’t had a drink, so I could if you want.”

“No, it’s okay. She’ll just say I’m overreacting.”

“Well, if you don’t overreact to getting in stranger’s car when you are drunk, what can you overreact to?”

“That’s exactly what I used to tell her.”

“Okay, as long as you’re sure about staying here. Tell me about your bar mitzvah.”

There wasn’t anything extraordinary about his bar mitzvah, but he wished that there was, just so he could tell her something.

“Nothing was really special, except the band. For whatever reason, my father called a African-American soul band. They were playing “Hava Nagila.” An all-black band were playing “Hava Nagila” in a party filled with bunch of Jewish guys wearing Kippa, and holding scripts.”

Rosana and Davin met few times after that. They went to few Bris for their friends, complained about the taste of Matzah during Passover, and visited each other’s temple on occasion. Davin started to talk about Rosana much more often. One day Ashley went to temple with Davin, and Rosana was there as well. Davin still thought that introducing them to each other was a bad idea.

Ashley said she couldn’t understand American culture, never, no matter how hard she tried, no matter how long she stayed in the U. S.

“We didn’t do anything Ashley, you know that.”

“I have no doubt about that, you’re not that kind of guy. But can you really tell me you

don't feel anything?"

He didn't say anything. He was scooted to the front of sofa, shivering a little bit.

"Call me, if you want to." She slammed the door and left. So he did, she didn't answer, and he left his last message.

He started to boil some water to cook instant noodles and got an egg out from the refrigerator. He had no intention of drinking before, but after seeing the vodka bottle inside the refrigerator, he took out a lemon and Vodka. It was so hard to keep back how he felt for Rosana in front of Ashley. He had nightmare once, for whatever the reason, where both Rosana and Ashley wanted to go to trip at the same time. Rosana to Israel and Ashley to Japan, both places that Davin always wanted to visit. Davin was in between a wall, on the right side Ashley talking about Osaka Castle, and on the left was Rosana talking about Western Wall.

"So what do you think?" they both asked at the same time.

"I don't know" he said, to both of them. Ashley got angry and took off all of her clothes. The clothes started to melt like cement, melting together all gooey and sticky. The clothes moved toward Davin's foot and wrapped around it like shoes tied on the ground. Rosana asked again.

"So what do you think?" Yes, let's do that, he wanted to say. Yes. Rosana got up and walked out the door. He wanted to follow and catch her, but he couldn't move his feet. Those melted clothes had come up to his knees. He wanted to shout for help, but he couldn't speak, like he was being choked.

With cooked instant noodles and a bunch of bills, he went to answering machine.

"You have three messages."

It was Rosana.

"Hey what's going on? Are you okay? You didn't show up at temple, and you're not answering your phone. I'm starting to get worried. Is it Ashley again?"

Beep. Message deleted."

"I'm really starting to get worried now, Davin."

Beep. Message deleted."

“Davin, I just can’t just wait like this. I’ll come to your home tonight about...”

“*Beep*. Message deleted.”

After a little while he heard the door knocking. He stared at the door for very long time, wondering what to say. He saw out in the hallway thru the peephole. He couldn’t see much but he saw the dark black hair of Ashley. He breathed in deeply for few times, trying to decide what he is going to say. He opened up the door. It was Rosana with her light brown hair. Maybe it was the light.